

 **What is Forgiveness?**
Forgiveness is the process of letting go of hurt, resentment, sadness, anger, hate, a desire for retaliation, and a whole host of negative feelings that are associated with hurtful behavior that has been directed at you, someone you care about, or humanity as a whole. Forgiveness is releasing the burden of past pain. The key point to remember about forgiveness is:

- Forgiveness is something you do for yourself and for your own well-being.

What Forgiveness is Not

- Forgiveness is *not* forgetting or denial of wrong action. As a matter of fact, the first step in forgiveness is to acknowledge the fact that you or someone you care about has been hurt by another person.
- Forgiveness is not rationalizing or excusing misbehavior.
- Forgiveness does not give permission for future misbehavior.
- Forgiveness does not require that you continue to be involved with the person who hurt you. You can forgive and still understand that the pain of the other person may be so great that it will continue to leak onto those in the vicinity in the form of hurtful behavior. Self-protection or keeping a distance may be required.

The Value of Forgiveness

“Hating someone is drinking poison and expecting the other person to die from it.” -Nelson Mandela

This quote introduces you to the *Importance of Forgiveness* in living a resilient and happy life. Forgiveness keeps us from poisoning ourselves with anger, hate, and resentment. There is substantial scientific research supporting the positive health effects of forgiveness. The process of forgiveness has been shown to result in reduced blood pressure and heart rate, lower anxiety, and a reduction in depression.



Forgiveness

Beliefs Interfering with Forgiveness

Which of these statements describe your beliefs about forgiving someone who has hurt you?

- The hurt was so great, how can I possibly forgive?
- There are some things that can never be forgiven.
- She doesn't deserve to be forgiven.
- Why should I forgive? What he did was wrong.
- She has to pay for what she did.
- He'll suffer if I withhold forgiveness.
- If I don't retaliate she'll (I'll) think I'm weak.
- Continuing to judge him makes me feel like I'm a better person than he is.
- Why should I show compassion for her? She certainly didn't care about how I felt.

Meanness is pain in disguise.

The Key to Forgiveness: Compassion

"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." – Philo of Alexandria

- This quote provides you with the *Key to Forgiveness* -- which is Compassion. Forgiveness is possible when you understand that when a person behaves badly, that behavior is their own suffering leaking into the world and onto you and other people in the form of negative behavior.
- When a person behaves badly toward you, you can be certain that the behavior is not about you, but a reflection of their overall approach to life and the degree of their pain and unhappiness, no matter what they would like you to believe about their behavior.

Forgiveness Takes Effort

"What we forgive too freely doesn't stay forgiven." – Mignon McLaughlin

You must start slowly. Don't make a list of all of the hurt, anger and resentment you carry which is currently poisoning you. The most difficult step in practicing forgiveness is learning to see the pain behind another's misbehavior. This takes practice, as with any effort at developing new skills and habits. You will want to start slowly. The first step in learning forgiveness is to start with the practice of Compassion, which as we've said, is the key to Forgiveness.

Part of compassion is to learn to see that we are all swimming in the same soup — EVERYONE is fighting a great battle.

Forgiveness

Practice Forgiveness

Philo of Alexandria said that everyone we meet is fighting a great battle. That means that you will have ample opportunity to practice forgiveness — there is lots of pain leaking into the world, whether it be in the form of rudeness or thoughtlessness, or in the form of more significant misbehavior such as abuse and violence.

To begin practicing forgiveness:

- Identify feelings you have toward other people that are poisoning you with hatred, resentment, hurt, and the rest of the negative emotions that keep you stuck in the past and from which you need to heal. Forgiveness is about creating a new future free of this pain.
- Pick one person and identify the hurtful behavior you'd like to forgive. Start small, with a minor misbehavior that you'd like to stop carrying around with you.
- Remind yourself that their hurtful behavior is their pain (their "great battle") in disguise.

If you can, try to understand what that pain is.

- Determine whether the goal is simply forgiveness, or forgiveness and reconciliation (restoring the relationship). Remember that reconciliation requires more than forgiveness. It requires three things of the other person: Only consider reconciliation to be your goal if:
 1. The individual acknowledges the misbehavior and apologizes. It's important to understand that an apology is not about past behavior, it's really a promise about future behavior. It's a promise not to do it again. Repeated apologies about the same behavior are nothing more than broken promises and don't need to be taken seriously.
 2. The individual asks for forgiveness.
 3. The individual does not repeat the behavior.

